

Tim and the Hidden People

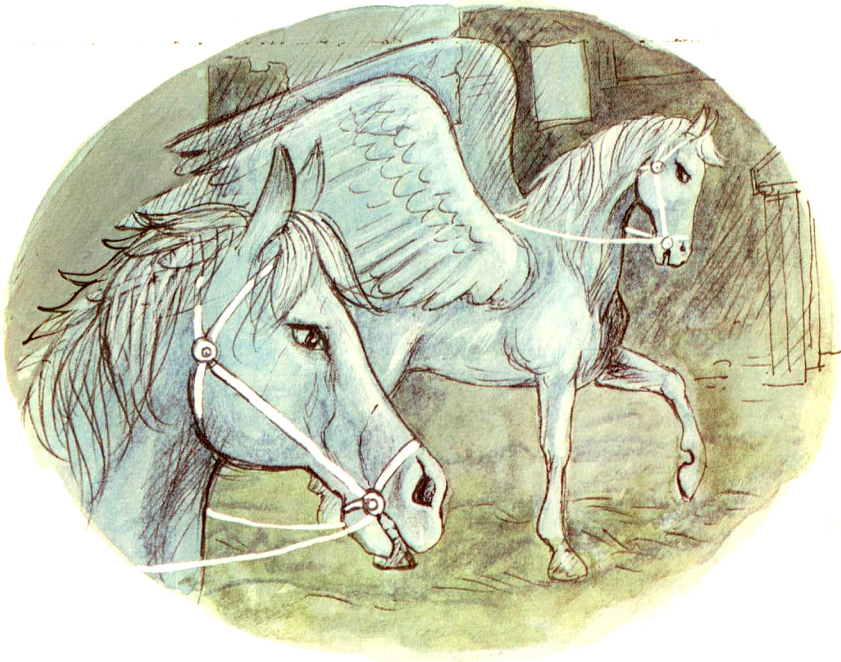
The Cry in the Dark

Sheila K. McCullagh

Illustrated by Ray Mutimer



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ARNOLD-WHEATON



Tim woke to find Sebastian standing by his ear, purring. He sat up in bed. It was still dark in the room, but a grey light was coming in through the window. It would soon be day.

Tim slid out of bed. Jim Black's lorry would be outside Mr. Penny's shop at six o'clock, and they mustn't be late. Jim wouldn't wait for them.

He looked out into The Yard. On the far side of The Yard, he could see Arun's house. There was a light in the attic window. Arun must be getting up.

Tim switched on the light, and slipped down to the bathroom to wash. There was no one about upstairs, but he could hear sounds downstairs in the kitchen. Aunt May must be getting breakfast.

He got dressed as fast as he could.

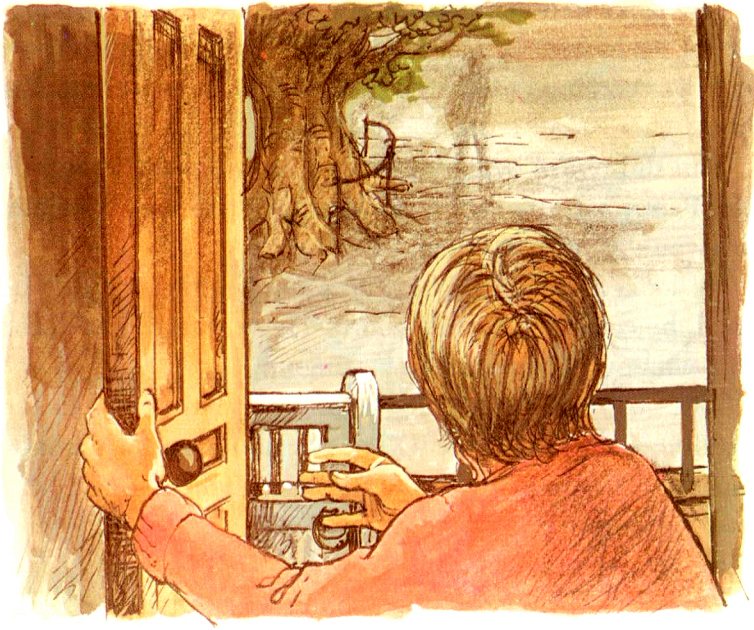
He made sure that the silver chain, with the silver coin on it, was round his neck. Then he took a quick look around his room, to make sure that he hadn't forgotten anything, and ran downstairs.

Sebastian was already in the kitchen, drinking a saucer of milk.

Aunt May was cooking eggs and bacon. She looked up as he went in.

"Go and see if Arun's coming," she said. "Your breakfast's all ready."

Tim ran upstairs to the hall again, and opened the front door.



For a moment, he thought he saw someone standing under the old tree in the middle of The Yard. There was a dark shadow there.

“Arun?” called Tim. “Arun?”

“Tim! Hallo, Tim!” Arun’s voice came from across The Yard.

Tim ran down the steps to meet him. Arun was wheeling his bicycle carefully across to Tim’s house. It was loaded with camping gear, like Tim’s, and all ready to go.

There was no one under the tree.

“Hallo, Tim,” said Arun again, as Tim ran up.

“Did you see anyone in The Yard?” asked Tim.

Arun shook his head. “Is there anyone about?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” said Tim. “There was a shadow under the tree. Never mind. I expect I’m just imagining things. And anyway, it might be one of Melinda’s friends. Breakfast’s ready. Leave your bike here, by the gate. It’ll be safe there. We can see it from the kitchen window, while we have breakfast.”

They left Arun’s bicycle propped up against the railing, and went inside.

Aunt May was ready for them. She had cooked the biggest breakfast Tim had ever had. They had cornflakes, and eggs and bacon, and sausages and fried potatoes. Then there was toast and jam.

“We shan’t need any more food today,” said Arun, when at last he pushed his plate away. “Thank you very much. We’ll be able to bike a long way after that.”

“I wish I could be sure that you’ll have a good meal every day,” said Aunt May. “And don’t have any accidents this time, Tim. Think about what you’re doing. Don’t go riding out into the middle of the road.”

“I’ll be careful,” said Tim.

“Well, I hope so,” said Aunt May.

At last they were ready. Arun helped Tim to carry his loaded bicycle down the steps outside the front door.

Aunt May came to the door to see them off.

“Are you really going to take that cat?” she asked, as Sebastian jumped up into the basket, purring. “He’d be much better off here.”

“He wants to come,” said Tim. “He’ll be fine.”

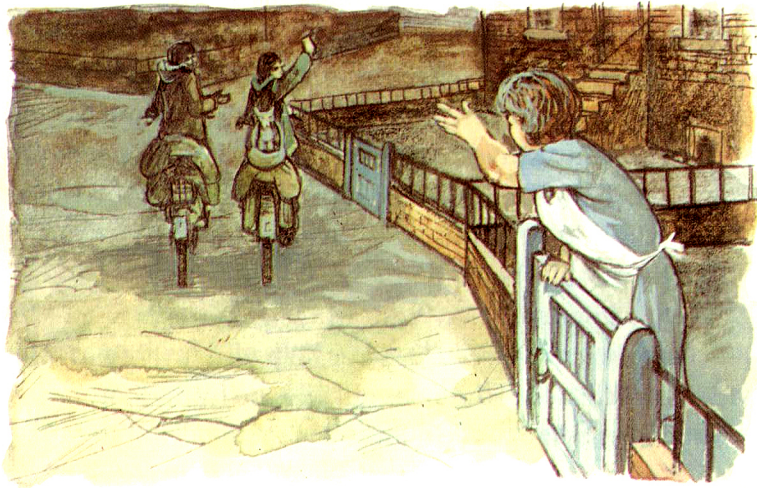
Aunt May shook her head. “Well, I don’t know,” she said. “Look after yourselves, and the cat too.”

“We will,” said Tim.

The boys set off, out of The Yard.

The bicycles felt heavy, with all the camping gear on the back. They wobbled a bit to begin with, but the boys pedalled along as fast as they could. By the time they got to Mr. Penny’s shop, they were used to the load on the bicycles.

It was almost six o’clock.



They got to the shop just in time. A big lorry came round the corner and stopped, just as they were getting off their bicycles.

Jim Black leaned out of the cab window.

“Well, Tim!” he called. “You’ve got here, then.”

He opened the door and jumped out.

“I’ll give you a hand with those bikes. Is this Arun? The two of you can ride in the cab with me, and we’ll put your things in the back.

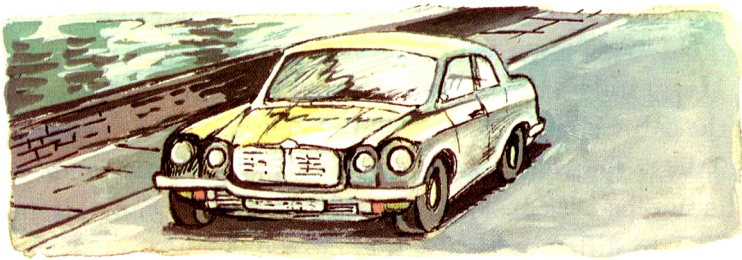
“Is that your cat? A cat going camping? I’ve seen everything, now!”

Jim climbed into the back of the lorry, and the boys lifted the bicycles up to him. Tim picked up Sebastian, and they all climbed into the cab.

As they turned out of the street, Tim saw a white car parked on the road by the canal. There was someone in it, but he couldn’t see who it was. Tim shivered.

“Are you all right, Tim?” whispered Arun.

Tim nodded. “You do the talking,” he whispered back.

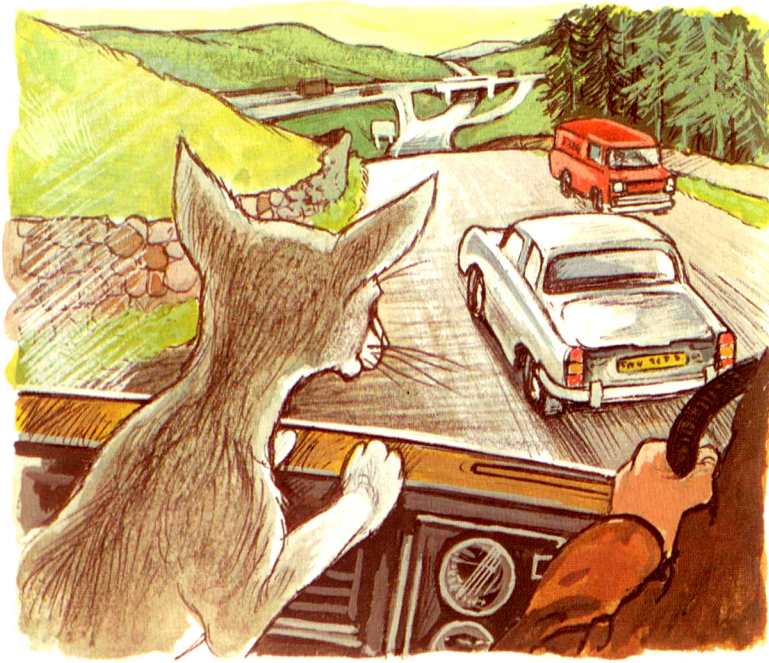




Jim talked cheerfully, as he drove through the town and out into the countryside. Arun did his best to talk, too. He answered Jim's questions about their tent, and the things they had with them. He didn't say much about where they were going.

It was so early, that the roads were nearly empty. They were soon out of the town, and driving into the country. Tim began to feel better. He knew what he was afraid of: he was afraid that some of the Hidden People might be looking for them. Some of them might be friends of Melinda, but some of them might be friends of the wind witches. Tim wanted to get away without *anyone* seeing them.

He sat still, saying nothing, and staring out of the window of the cab. Sebastian sat on Tim's knee, and he seemed to be watching the road as closely as Tim was. Tim wondered whether he was looking for Hidden People too. He felt Sebastian stiffen suddenly.



A white car passed them. It looked like the car Tim had seen before by the canal, but he wasn't sure. This time, Tim saw that the driver was a man with dark hair and a dark beard.

The car shot ahead of them, as the lorry turned towards the motorway. It was travelling very fast, and it was going north.

Sebastian put his paws up on the top of the dashboard, and watched it out of sight. Then he sat down again on Tim's knee, still looking out of the window.

Tim looked at Arun, but Arun was talking to Jim.

They drove north along the motorway, hour after hour. At last Jim stopped at a Service Station, for sandwiches and petrol. Then they went on again, all through the long afternoon, until at last Jim swung the lorry off the motorway, and along a country road.

It wasn't long before they came to a farm with a notice at the gate saying, 'Bed and Breakfast. Camping in the orchard.'

Jim slowed down. "This would be a good place for you tonight," he said. "I'm not going much farther, and you could camp here. It'd be nice and quiet. You want to get in before it's dark."

"It would be fine," said Arun.

Jim stopped the lorry, and lifted their bicycles out of the back for them.

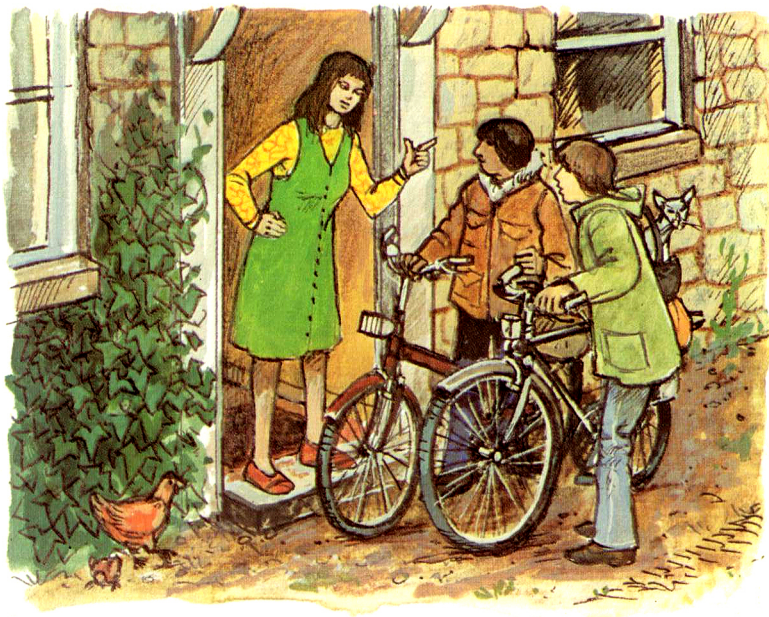
"There you are," he said. "Now you're on your own."

"Thanks very much. Thanks, Jim," they called, as he climbed back into the cab.

Jim gave them a wave. Sebastian jumped back into the basket, and they stood in the road, holding their bicycles until the lorry was gone.

"Are you all right, Tim?" asked Arun, as they turned back to the farm.

Tim nodded. "I'm all right," he said. "I can't help watching all the time, in case there are Hidden People about. But I'm all right, and I haven't seen any of them."



They went up to the front door, and knocked. A friendly looking woman opened the door.

“Can we camp in the orchard?” asked Tim.

She nodded cheerfully. “Just the two of you?” she asked. “And that little cat? You’ve got a tent? That’ll be twenty-five pence. The orchard’s round at the back. You can find it yourselves. Set up your tent anywhere you like. There’s no one else there. We can let you have eggs and milk if you want them. Just come to the back door.”

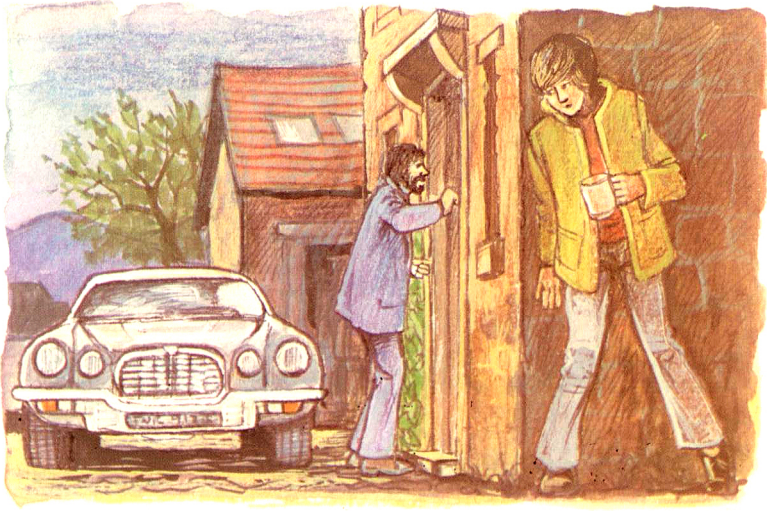
Arun handed her the money. She shut the door, and they wheeled their bicycles round to the orchard.



It was beginning to get dark. There was plenty of room on the grass. There was no one else there. Arun and Tim propped their bicycles up against a tree. Sebastian jumped down, purring, and rubbing himself against Tim's legs, as they unpacked the camping things.

They soon set up the tent, and Arun got out the little primus stove.

"There's a tap over there," he said. "I'll get some water. Do you want to go for some milk?"



Tim picked up a mug, and went over to the back door of the farmhouse.

He was just going to knock, when he heard a car drive in at the front. He stopped and listened. He heard the car door slam.

Tim slipped along around the side of the house, keeping close to the wall.

He looked round the corner, and saw a white car standing on the gravel. A man with dark hair and a dark beard was knocking on the front door. As Tim watched, the woman opened it, and Tim heard the man say: "I see you do bed and breakfast."

Tim didn't wait for any more. He turned round, and ran back to the orchard as quickly and quietly as he could.



Arun was putting out some food, and the pot of water on the stove was just beginning to boil. He looked up as Tim came running back.

“What is it?” he asked. “What’s happened, Tim? You look as if you’d seen a ghost!”

“I don’t know who I’ve seen,” Tim gasped. “But I think it’s one of the Strange Ones. He was driving that white car. I saw him near the canal this morning, and I saw him again on the road. And now he’s here. He was asking if he could stay the night. I’m sure he’s following us, Arun. We’ve got to go on. It’s not safe to stay here. Look!”

He pointed to Sebastian. Sebastian was standing staring towards the house. His tail was waving, and his eyes were black.

“Sebastian knows, just as well as I do,” said Tim. “Come on, Arun. We’ve got to pack up again.”

“All right, Tim,” said Arun, “if you’re sure he’s after us.”

“I’m sure,” said Tim.

“Then we’d better wait till it’s really dark,” said Arun. “Then he won’t see us leave. He must know we’re here. Let’s have supper, just as if we hadn’t seen him, and were going to stay for the night. Then we’ll pack up. As soon as it’s really dark, we’ll get the tent down, and slip off.”

“All right,” said Tim. “Sebastian, keep watch for us.”

Sebastian looked round, gave a little purr, and ran off towards the house. They saw him climb up into one of the trees.





They cooked a tin of chicken stew that they had brought with them, and made some tea. They drank the tea with powdered milk. Tim didn't want to go back to the house.

Then they settled down to wait. The light faded, and the shadows grew dark under the trees.



At last Tim said, "Let's load the bikes now."

They took down the tent, and finished packing up.

"Sebastian!" whispered Tim.

There was a little purr, and Sebastian jumped down from the tree, and ran across to them.

They pushed their bicycles silently over the grass, and round by the side of the house. They kept off the gravel, and they didn't switch their bicycle lamps on. The stars were out, and they could see the white shape of the car, standing near the front door.

Soon, they were out of the gate. Sebastian jumped up into his basket, and they set off along the dark road, into the night.

There was no moon, but the stars were out. The road was a grey path in front of them, with dark grass on each side.

At first they rode very slowly. They were afraid that they might run into something, or ride right off the road. But they could see the tops of the hedges, black against the sky, and so they had some idea of which way the road was going.

Something white stood out in the darkness ahead. They stopped, and walked towards it, pushing their bicycles.

It was a signpost. They had come to a crossroads.

“Let’s go this way,” whispered Tim. “No one will know which way we’ve gone.”

They turned to the left, and cycled slowly on again. They came to another crossroads, and this time they turned right, on to a narrower road.

They hadn’t gone very far, when the road ran under some trees, and it was so dark that they had to get off and walk.

“We must have come into a wood,” said Arun. “I’m going to use my lamp.”

He switched it on. The beam of light lit up the edge of a wood. Great beech trees grew along the road, and beyond the trees, farther into the wood, they could see thick clumps of bushes.

Sebastian jumped out of the basket on Tim’s bicycle, and ran towards the wood. He stopped, and looked back at them.





“Let’s stop here for the night,” said Tim. “We could find a place to hide in those bushes. Sebastian thinks this is a good place, too. He’d never lead us into the wood, if there were Hidden People about.”

“All right,” said Arun. “We couldn’t go on much farther, anyway. We’re too tired.”

There was no fence. They pushed their bicycles under the trees, and through a gap in the bushes.

They found themselves in an open space under a big beech tree. Bushes and trees were all around them.

“It’s a good place,” said Tim, propping his bicycle up against a tree. “Let’s get the tent up. I’m going to sleep in my clothes, just in case.”

Half an hour later, they were asleep inside the tent, with Sebastian curled up on Tim’s feet.



Tim didn't know how long he had been asleep, when he heard a cry.

He sat up, listening.

The cry came again. It was a long way away. It was a long, wild cry, that made the hair stand up on the back of his head.

"Arun!" he whispered. "Arun! Are you awake?"

"Yes," came Arun's whisper in reply. "Did you hear it, Tim? What is it?"

"I don't know," said Tim, "but I don't like the sound of it. Where's Sebastian?"

As he spoke, there was a little, urgent "Rrrr!" and Sebastian came in through the tent door.

"Rrrr!" cried Sebastian. He pushed his nose into Tim's hand, and ran to the tent door again.

"Sebastian wants us outside," said Tim.



The boys struggled out of their sleeping bags, and crawled out of the tent.

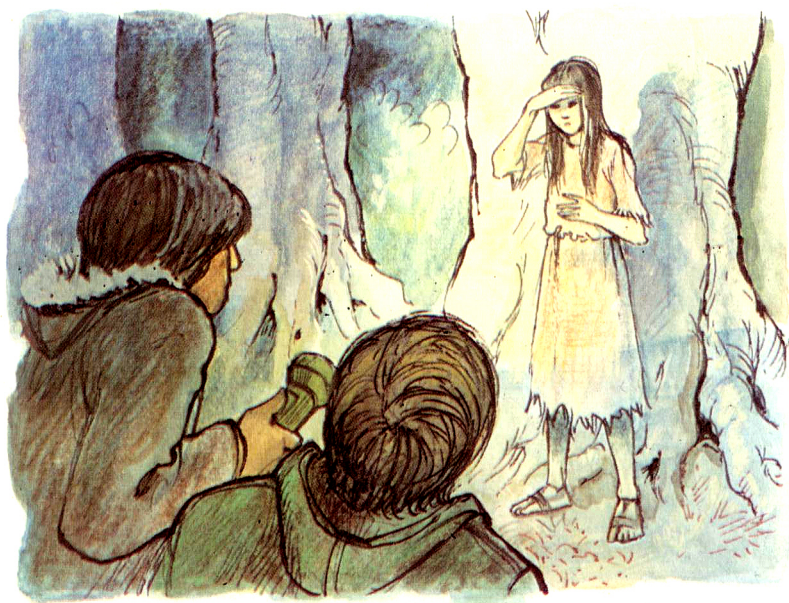
It was still very dark under the trees.

The long, wild cry came again.

"It's a dog," said Tim. "It's a hound."

Something moved in the darkness near them.

"Who's there?" said Arun sharply.



“Don’t be afraid,” a soft voice answered. “I’m one of the wood people.”

A darker shadow moved under the tree.

Arun switched on his torch.

The beam of light lit up a girl of about their own age. She had long, dark hair. Her arms and legs were bare, in spite of the cold, and she was very brown. She was dressed in some kind of rough woollen tunic, and she had a cord round her waist. There were sandals on her bare feet.

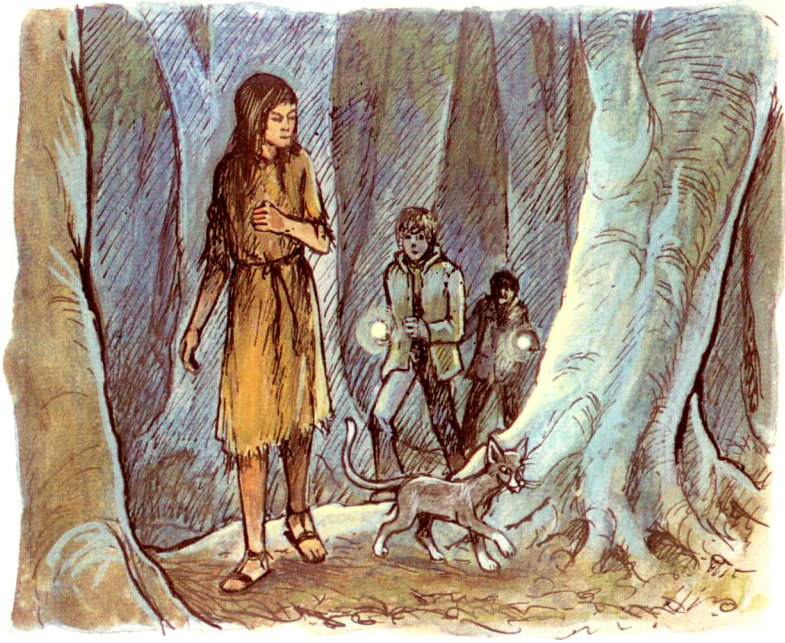
She put up a hand, to shield her eyes from the light, and Arun lowered the beam of his torch.



“My name is Stareth,” the girl said quietly. “I am one of the wood people. Alan Tremaine asked us to keep watch for you. You must come with me. You haven’t much time. The witches’ friends are out after you. Listen!”

The long howl came again through the darkness.

“They are tracking you with their dogs. You must leave everything here, and come with me. Quickly. I’ll get these things for you later, but you must come now.”



“But how do we know that you’re not one of the witches’ friends too?” asked Arun.

“There’s no time to tell you. You must trust me,” said Stareth. “This way. Quickly!”

She turned back into the wood.

“Rrrr!” cried Sebastian, and ran after her.

“She’s all right,” said Tim. “Sebastian knows. Come on. We’ll leave everything.”

They slipped across the soft leaves under the trees and into the dark bushes, following Stareth.



Both Arun and Tim had torches.

Stareth was waiting for them on a little path leading deeper into the wood.

“Put the torches out!” she whispered. “We must go in the dark. Quickly!”

As she spoke, the dog howled again. It was much closer.

The boys switched off their torches, and hurried down the path after Stareth, with Sebastian at their heels. At first, they could see nothing. But as their eyes got used to the dark, they could make out the line of the path.

They began to run. The path was so soft under their feet, that they made very little sound.



Suddenly, the wood opened out, and they found themselves on the grass, under the open sky.

A big, ruined stone wall stood in front of them, with a great arched doorway in it.

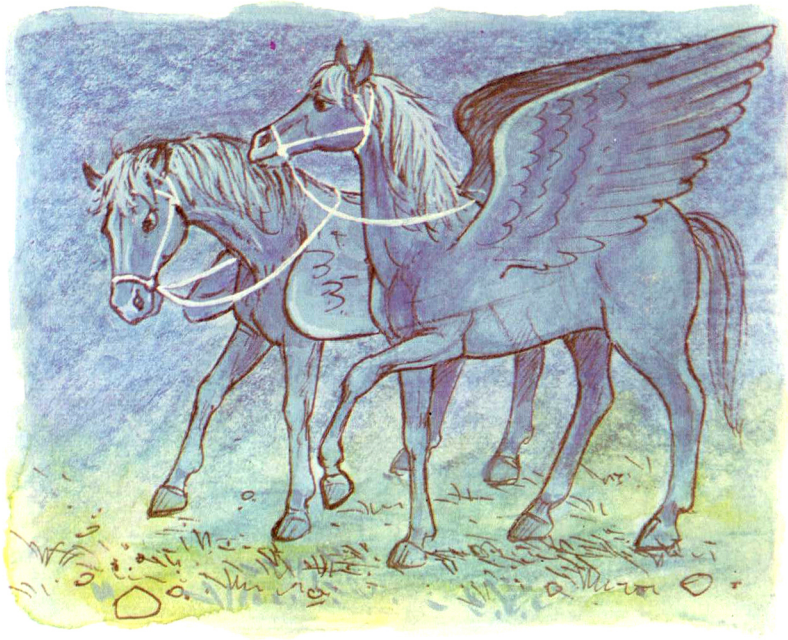
There was no door. Stareth led the way under the arch, into an old courtyard.

A big, ruined house stood on the far side of it, but it was so dark that Tim and Arun could only just make out the ruined walls against the sky.



Stareth stopped, and turned to them.

“You must fly north,” she said quickly. “Alan Tremaine has sent the night-mares for you, and you must fly north to meet him tonight.”



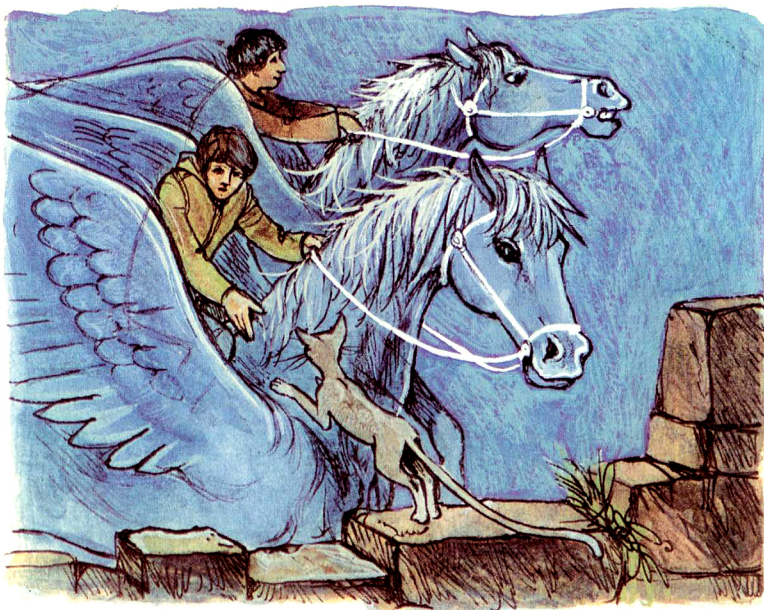
As she spoke, two dark shadows moved out from the darkness under the walls. They were beautiful, dark blue horses with silver bridles.

“The night-mares!” cried Tim.

“Sh!” whispered Stareth. “The witches’ friends are not far behind. Mount and ride!”

“What about you?” asked Arun.

“I shall be safe enough. They don’t want me, and I know the paths. I can go where they can’t follow me. But you must ride north. Be quick!”



Tim and Arun scrambled up on to the horses, and gripped the bridles.

Sebastian jumped up on to one of the ruined walls, ran along the top, and jumped down on to Tim's horse.

"I shall bring all your things to this house tomorrow," said Stareth. "You will find them all here when you return. Fly, now! The night-mares will take you to Alan Tremaine. Fly!"

Before Arun or Tim could answer, the great horses spread their wings, took three steps across the courtyard, and were up over the wall, flying up into the starlight.



Sebastian pressed himself back against Tim, and settled down with an excited purr.

As the horses swept out over the wood, Tim looked down.

Men with lanterns were running along the road. A great hound bounded along beside them. As he watched, the men turned into the wood, towards the boys' tent.

Tim looked up at the stars over his head. There was the great bear, and the two stars pointing to the north. The wind blew his hair back.

The horses swung northward, towards the north star.



FLIGHTPATH TO READING

A Series

1. Tim and Tobias
2. All the Fun of the Fair
3. Tim Meets Captain Jory
4. Tim and the Smugglers
5. Tim and the Witches
6. The Highwayman
7. Magic in The Yard
8. The Key

B Series

1. The Return of The Key
2. Captain Jory Lends a Hand
3. The Stump People
4. Watchers in The Yard
5. Red for Danger
6. At the House of the Safe Witch
7. Tim in Hiding
8. On the Night of the Full Moon

C Series

1. The Pool by the Whispering Tree
2. Tim in Trouble
3. On the Road to the North
4. Riding into Danger
5. Mandrake's Castle
6. Escape by Night
7. Three Fires on the Dark Tower
8. Tim Rides on the Ghost Bus

D Series

1. News from the North
2. The Cry in the Dark
3. The Shield Stone
4. The Storm over the Sea
5. The Cave of the Wind Witches
6. In Diaman's Cave
7. Danger on the Moor
8. At the Hill of the Stone Prisons

Flightpath to Reading D2

E-G

